

According to Risula, just about every crop grown in Saskatchewan is at some degree of risk from grasshopper damage. With cereals, grasshoppers generally consume the leaf material, which reduces the photosynthetic ability of the plant. With crops like lentil or flax, they usually attack the pods or bolls, which directly impacts yield.

In other crops such as canola, mustard or pea, grasshoppers may present an additional problem. "If they are present when the crop is being combined, their body parts can get picked up in the harvest and contaminate the sample, lowering the seed quality and requiring further processing," Risula said.

"Even in those areas where projections are low, producers would be well-served keeping a close eye on the situation, since infestations can vary widely on a field-by-field basis."

More information and advice on grasshopper projections and control methods can be found on the Saskatchewan Agriculture website or by calling the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

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FIELD GRAZING TOUR COMBINES STEERS AND SNOWMOBILES

A unique outing organized by Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) will let cattle producers mix business with pleasure while looking at ways to lower their winter feeding costs.

A tour of five cattle farms in the Kenaston area will take place on February 12 – by snowmobile, as a traditional “poker rally” style of event.

“We were looking to try something different and interesting to encourage more people to participate,” said Duane Hill, a Conservation Program Specialist with DUC. “We’re hoping people will come out for the fun of the poker rally, but, at the same time, maybe learn something new about livestock management in the winter.”

So far, so good – Hill says producers who have heard about the event are already starting to register.

Those participating in the tour will congregate at the Kenaston Hall on the morning of February 12. The snowmobiles will leave at 10:00 a.m. and return around 4:30 p.m. The route will cover about 80 miles in total.

“We’re going to look at five different methods producers are using to feed their cattle out in the field, as well as different watering systems they are using to get water to the cows in winter,” Hill stated. “We’ll also be looking at the various costs associated with doing this versus the traditional method of wintering cattle in a corral and using a bale processor or starting your tractor every day.”

The tour is also planned as a genuine poker rally. At each of the five stops, participants will be given a playing card. At the end of the day, the person with the best poker hand will win a 24-foot portable panel windbreak fence.

Although the theme of the event revolves around snowmobiles, Hill encourages people to come along even if they want to drive their vehicles from spot to spot. Maps will be provided with both the cross-country and the road routes marked out.

“Regardless how they choose to travel, they should wear warm clothing, because we will be transporting them from the road into the field using a snowmobile so that we can show them the actual feeding system right up front,” he noted.

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The tour will be stopping partway through the trip to warm up, drink some hot chocolate and cook some hot dogs over a bonfire. A supper will also be served in Kenaston at the end of the trip.

Hill says DUC is showcasing field grazing techniques because they often hold tremendous economic and environmental benefits for cattle operations. Wintering cows out in the field can lower a producer's operating costs considerably, require less labour throughout the course of the year, is friendlier to the environment, allows for natural manure application, and is less stressful on the animals.

One of the demonstrations will show how a simple pair of snowshoes can sometimes replace tractors and other pieces of machinery as a means of effectively getting around the farm or the field in the winter.

According to Hill, this type of thinking can have real, tangible benefits for beef producers being squeezed by rising input costs and lower commodity prices.

"Whether you're using a bunch of equipment or a pair of snowshoes to do the same job, the price of the calf is the price of the calf," he stated. "Producers can't always control the prices they get, but they may have an opportunity to try something different in order to better control their input costs. Snowshoe payments are easier to afford than a bale processor or hay buster payments, or tractor maintenance costs – all that stuff."

Anyone interested in obtaining more information or registering for the snowmobile poker rally/ranch tour can call the DUC office in Saskatoon at (306) 665-7356. Registration costs are \$10 per person, which includes both meals.

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GRAZING MENTORS ARE IN DEMAND

Producers interested in improving their grazing management are urged to act without delay to sign up for this year's "Grazing Mentorship Program." The program is operated by the Saskatchewan Forage Council with funding from the Canadian Cattlemen's Association and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

"The program is designed to hook grazing mentors up with individuals who are looking to take their grazing management to the next level, or even just the first level," said provincial co-ordinator Ross MacDonald. "It's a means of co-ordinating peer to peer grazing information and mentorship."

The idea is to allow individual producers to work one-on-one with experienced grazing managers in order to receive input and suggestions on how to improve their profits, efficiency, forage productivity, and use of water and land resources.

"We have a series of grazing mentors across the province, so there's likely a mentor in any given corner of the province," MacDonald said. "The majority of our mentors are quite experienced. A lot of them have dealt with intensive grazing, grazing large numbers of animals, grazing late into the winter season with both stockpiled forages and bale grazing, as well as alternative supply methods."

The program is partially subsidized, so producers pay only a fraction of the actual cost. Producers are asked to pay a \$100 application fee, and the program kicks in an additional \$600 to pay the mentor for his or her time.

"It is equivalent to about 16 hours, or two days, of mentoring. Depending on what the individual needs are, those 16 hours can be split up however the two participants feel will work best," MacDonald said.

"Usually there is an initial visit, some discussion about where each is at, some things to think about, some correspondence in between, and possibly another meeting in the field season."

The topics of discussion can range right across the grazing management spectrum, including fencing, watering systems, plant growth, forage species selections, dormant season grazing – just about anything a producer might have questions about. There is no limitation on the size of operation that can become involved.

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FORAGE SELECTION MADE EASY WITH NEW CD

The Saskatchewan Forage Council (SFC) has developed a new forage management tool that is available free of charge to producers, agrologists, conservationists and any other interested parties.

The “Dryland Forage Species Adaptation” CD provides valuable technical information to assist in planning the use of forages.

According to SFC Executive Director Janice Bruynooghe, the CD was developed to assist users in selecting the forage species best suited to their land. “It’s an interactive tool that enables them to access comprehensive data on different forage species in order to choose the best one for their particular needs.”

Information on 45 forage species, both tame and native, legume and grass, has been compiled in the CD. Photos and a detailed description of each species are provided, including yields, recommended stocking rates and other management information.

The data is organized to allow producers to input specific factors related to the type of soil in which the forage will be seeded and the purpose for which it is intended. This may include soil zone, soil texture, soil pH, salinity, moisture conditions, desired use, expected timing of use, stand longevity and many other variables.

“They can basically enter their criteria, and this tool will sort through the huge database of information that’s built in on the back-end and identify the species that would best suit their specific conditions,” Bruynooghe said.

The tool can also be used in reverse. Users looking for information on any particular forage species can simply click on its name, and the CD will display all the details, including an overview of nutritional feed quality, if available.

According to Bruynooghe, among the most useful features incorporated in the CD are seeding rate and cost calculators for producers. Users are able to select specific forage species or mixtures and input information such as germination or purity percentages. A program then automatically calculates the number of pounds per acre they would need to seed in order to produce an optimal stand. When costs are subsequently entered, the tool will also calculate the cost-per-acre of seeding a specific mixture.

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"It's a common question that producers often have. Working through those calculations [on paper] is a bit cumbersome at times, and this is just a really slick, quick way to go in and determine seeding rates and cost-per-acre," Bruynooghe said.

"Everything comes down to economics, and a key to this information is that it can help producers through that decision-making process on the financial side."

Above all, Bruynooghe says the greatest advantage offered by the CD is convenience. "Much of this information is currently available, but it is very scattered. Producers often have to talk to extension agrologists or cross-reference many fact sheets to get what they need," she stated.

"What this tool provides is a nice, neat compilation of information. It's very user-friendly and easy to navigate."

Funding to undertake the project was provided by the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) Greencover Canada Program. Project partners include AAFC, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation.

Anyone interested in obtaining a free copy of the "Dryland Forage Species Adaptation" CD can contact the SFC by phone at (306) 966-2148 or by e-mail at jbruynooghe@saskforage.ca. The material is also available on the SFC website at www.saskforage.ca in both high-speed and dial-up versions.

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2008 GRASSHOPPER FORECAST SHOWS FEW POCKETS OF CONCERN

It appears that most of Saskatchewan should be relatively safe from major grasshopper infestations for 2008, although there are some pockets of concern around the province.

That's the prognosis contained in the "2008 Grasshopper Forecast" compiled by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture in conjunction with Saskatchewan Crop Insurance.

The forecast, along with a corresponding colour-coded map showing the projected infestation risk across the province, has now been posted on the ministry's website at www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca.

"Overall, it looks like the majority of the province falls into the 'none to very light' category, where the grasshopper population should not be a problem," said Dale Risula, the Integrated Crop Management Systems Specialist with the Agriculture Knowledge Centre in Moose Jaw.

"There are a few isolated regions that have the potential for large populations of grasshoppers in 2008, but those are very small, particular areas," he added. "It appears that there may be three or four specific zones that could encounter some difficulties."

The forecast is based on the adult grasshopper counts observed during August and early September 2007 by Saskatchewan Crop Insurance field staff. The survey includes more than 1,100 sites throughout the province. The forecast is based on adult grasshoppers capable of reproduction. This provides an estimate of the number of eggs that may hatch the following spring and present a risk to crops in 2008.

"The forecast is not an absolute certainty," Risula noted. "It is just to say what the probability or the foundation is for grasshopper numbers in the upcoming growing season."

The primary factor determining actual grasshopper numbers will be the weather next spring.

"The hatch in the springtime is going to depend on growing degree days, which is a measure of accumulated heat units. If it's a dry, warm spring and the soil heats up fairly significantly, you could see an increase in the hatch numbers that take place. If it's a cold, wet spring, you will probably see populations kept at bay."

Populations can be affected by several other factors, including the presence of predatory insects, as well as the incidence of disease.

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"We've had a range of mentorships, from individuals who are just getting started with small numbers and smaller land bases to those who are going from a small operation to a larger operation," MacDonald said. "Mentors say they sometimes learn as much as they teach when dealing with more experienced operators."

There are currently 12 mentors available in the province, with space for approximately 55 producers to receive their assistance, so it is advisable to sign up as soon as possible. Interested producers should contact the Saskatchewan Forage Council by visiting their website at www.saskforage.ca, or by calling MacDonald directly at (306) 447-4600.

MacDonald is an animal and range agrologist who is himself an active rancher, running a herd of some 400 custom-grazed yearlings and a small cow-calf herd. He says the mentorship program is just a case of well-organized networking with peers.

"The intent is not necessarily to prescribe any sort of management, but to provide a producer sounding-board for ideas or innovations, and hopefully to save people some mistakes and some time," he said.

"If nothing else, it's a great opportunity to get some outside ideas or just confirmation that maybe you're on the right track."

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PULSE DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS COMING UP IN THE SOUTH

Pulse producers will have access to top pulse industry researchers, market analysts and industry representatives through a series of regional workshops being held in early February.

The three pulse development workshops are a collaboration of the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers (SPG) and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture.

SPG Communications Officer Rachel Kehrig says they expect strong attendance at the meetings in Moose Jaw, Weyburn and Swift Current, where last year more than 250 producers attended.

“These workshops are kind of like a smaller version of Pulse Days. We bring some speakers in to talk about some of the new varieties they are introducing through the crop development centre, and we also have speakers who talk about the market outlook,” Kehrig said.

“It is also a chance for the pulse producers to meet some of the staff and board members of the SPG.”

SPG Executive Director Garth Patterson says the workshops are being held in the southern half of the province by design.

“We’ve had growers tell us that they wait and plan for this, instead of coming up to Pulse Days in Saskatoon, because it’s closer to home. We know from past surveys at Pulse Days that the closer the people farm to Saskatoon, the more likely they are to come to Pulse Days. Once you get 250 kilometres out of the city, the attendance drops off. So, historically, we have found that there is a different audience for these workshops,” Patterson said.

“Because pulses are largely produced in southern Saskatchewan, this is where we have focused our regional meetings. We are reaching out to people who don’t normally come to Pulse Days.”

Kehrig echoes that sentiment.

“It provides the opportunity for producers who missed Pulse Days to hear some of the information that was presented, especially market outlooks,” she noted, highlighting new agronomy research, new pulse crop varieties and a market update as topics slated for discussion.

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"These meetings are on a smaller scale than the annual conference, so they are a lot more interactive, and producers have the opportunity to sit down and talk with some of the speakers, industry representatives, top pulse researchers and SPG board and staff," Kehrig added.

The agenda includes: Brian Clancey of STAT Publishing, who will discuss market outlooks; Dr. Yantai Gan, an agronomist with Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Swift Current, who will talk about new agronomy research; Ken Panchuk, a provincial soil specialist with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, speaking about pulse crop fertility needs; and Penny Pearse, a disease specialist with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, discussing the *Ascochyta* Sentinel Plant Project being conducted in Swift Current.

Also at the workshops will be Dr. Bert Vandenberg with the University of Saskatchewan's Crop Development Centre, who will be discussing the history of pulses in his presentation, "Foods from the Cradle of Civilization." Finally, the three pulse breeders from the Crop Development Centre – Vandenberg, Dr. Bunyamin Tar'an and Dr. Tom Warkentin – will present the new pulse crop varieties for 2008.

The workshops will be held in Swift Current on February 5 at the Palliser Pavilion, Moose Jaw on February 6 at the Heritage Inn, and Weyburn on February 7 at the McKenna Hall. All meetings run from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Producers can pre-register by calling Saskatchewan Agriculture's Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377 by February 1. The \$15 registration fee includes morning coffee and lunch.

Additional information can be found online at www.saskpulse.com.

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